

# 20 Years of READ

A Lifetime of Rural Prosperity







# 20 Years and Beyond

Twenty years ago, eight porters carried 900 books over a 12,000-foot pass down into the tiny village of Junbesi, Nepal to open the very first READ Community Library and Resource Center.

In those days, the literacy rate in Nepal was one of the lowest in Asia. Schools had very few books, teachers or educational resources. Illiterate adults had few opportunities to learn to read, and entire communities had no access to critical health information. When Ang Domi Lama, a sirdar on an Everest trek, suggested that a library would transform his village, it seemed like a great way to address many of the challenges rural villagers faced. And so READ Global was born.

READ began as the nonprofit arm of the educational adventure travel company Myths and Mountains, with a dream to make rural villages viable places for families to live, learn and prosper, and to slow the pace of migration to polluted urban centers. From the beginning, it was important to incorporate sustainability into the model, so READ began to seed businesses chosen by each community to generate enough income to sustain the center and also provide local jobs.

Today, READ has established more than 55 Community Library and Resource Centers across Nepal, India and Bhutan, reaching 1.8 million people. It has launched rural businesses like furniture factories, ambulance services, storefront rentals and sewing centers. During the years, READ has transformed rural communities. Mothers can now send their children to pre-school in a READ Center, rather than having them play outside in the dirt. Students and community members have free access to computers and the Internet. Books and newspapers are available for the entire community, and many adults are acquiring life-changing literacy skills.

As the organization plans for the future, READ will broaden and deepen its impact. In the next five years, READ will build more centers to expand its reach by 50 percent throughout India, Nepal and Bhutan. We will help villagers better utilize technology and employ new models for sustaining enterprises with the dual goals of providing even more jobs in each community and generating increased revenues to maintain the health of READ Centers.

We thank all of you – donors, supporters, partners, staff and our incredible communities – for building a unique and award-winning program that has enabled so many people to improve their lives.

READ and its partner communities certainly have a lot to celebrate. Yet 1.7 billion people still live in absolute poverty, and two-thirds of those live in rural communities. We hope you will consider supporting us as we move into the next decade of inspiring rural prosperity.

Happy 20th anniversary!

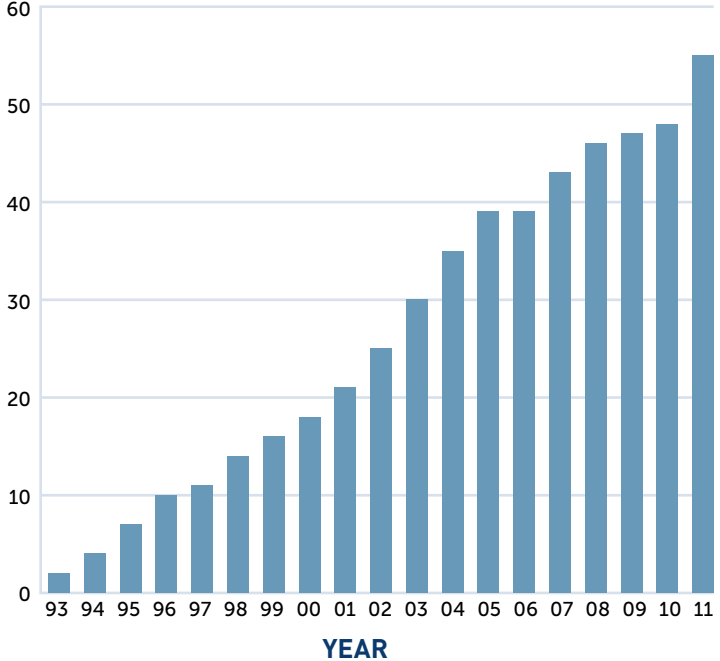
Dr. Antonia Neubauer  
Founder

Tina Sciabica  
Executive Director





# Growth in READ Centers



READ will build more than 30 new Community Library and Resource Centers in Bhutan, India and Nepal by 2016. In collaboration with international and local NGOs, READ will offer valuable resources and educational programming to an additional half a million rural villagers in the next five years.



**55** READ CENTERS OPENED. **125** VILLAGES SERVED. **1.8** MILLION RURAL VILLAGERS REACHED. **82** FOR-PROFIT ENTERPRISES LAUNCHED.



# READ Centers Are Transforming Communities

READ CENTERS ARE COMMUNITY-OWNED  
AND MANAGED. FOR-PROFIT ENTERPRISES,  
SEEDED BY READ, HELP SUSTAIN EACH CENTER.

READ Global brings together education, enterprise and community development to create lasting social change in rural communities. Each READ Community Library and Resource Center is designed to address the multiple challenges rural communities face and offer a welcoming environment for individuals, families and communities.

## LIBRARY SECTION

We view libraries as the heart of READ Centers. They develop a culture of reading, literacy and knowledge that empowers communities. Fully stocked with an average of 4,500 books, READ libraries offer large selections for both the literate and neo-literate. Book collections emphasize educational topics such as current affairs, health, legal rights and literacy. Libraries also contain books reflecting the local school curriculum for those who are not able to attend school.

## COMPUTER CENTER

Computer skills deepen the impact of literacy. READ computer centers house an average of five computers available for public use. Each center offers a variety of trainings. Through Internet access, rural villagers can stay connected to the global community and expand their learning. Basic word-processing, spreadsheet and photo-editing proficiency are helping individuals become better prepared for the job market.

## EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT SECTION

Pre-school age children have little or no access to educational material or learning toys in many of the communities where READ works. We have seen that a culture of literacy and learning is truly driven by the youngest generation, so we make sure that all READ Centers address early childhood development with a separate section for children, a wide range of books and culturally relevant educational toys.

## WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT CENTER

Women and adolescent girls living in rural villages have few acceptable reasons to leave their homes. READ is changing this. Our Women's Empowerment Centers provide important and valid reasons for women and older girls to journey out, as well as a safe space for them to gather, share their challenges and support each other as they work toward a better future.

## TRAINING AND MEETING HALL

READ Centers serve as an ideal and much-needed location for community gatherings and trainings. Programming on topics such as healthcare, livelihood skills and legal rights are offered to communities, often in partnership with international and local NGOs.



# Our Reach: 1.8 Million Rural Villagers



## JAN JAGRITI GYAN KENDRA COMMUNITY LIBRARY AND RESOURCE CENTER

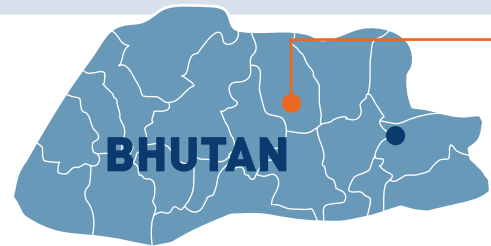
Established: 2011  
 Sustaining Enterprise: Gooseberry products  
 Reach: 7,400  
 The Jan Jagriti Gyan Kendra Center is 100% women-run. The center houses a school for young girls where they learn life skills in order to create better futures.



READ launched in India in 2008. Currently focused on the states of Rajasthan, Haryana, Manipur and West Bengal, we plan to follow our successful model and build 10-15 more READ Centers in India during the next five years.

## TUBILEIMA RURAL COMMUNITY LIBRARY AND RESOURCE CENTER

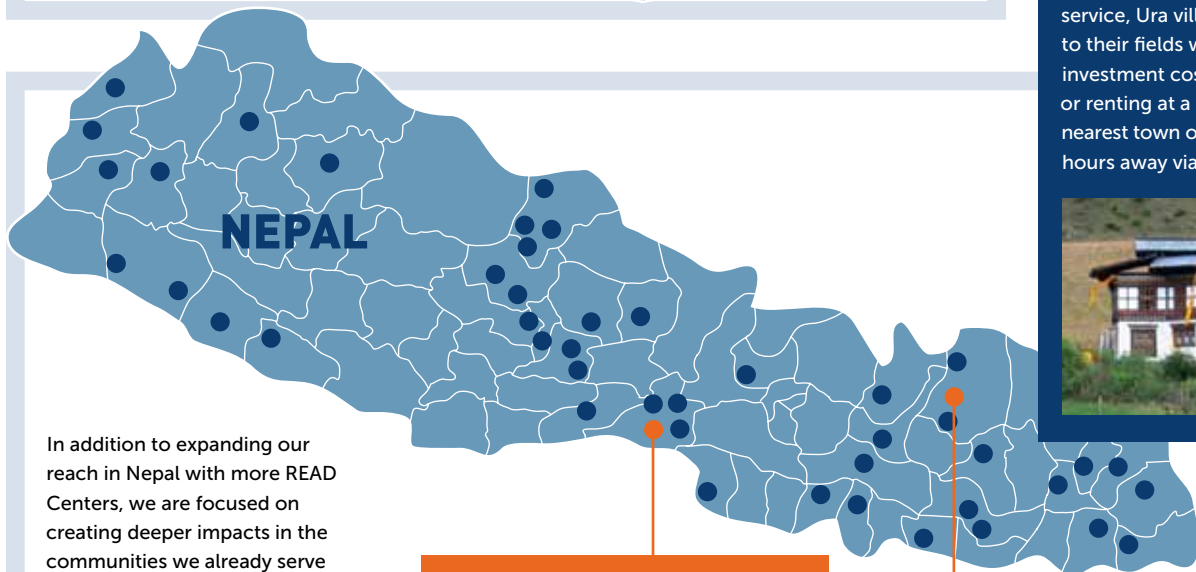
Established: 2009  
 Sustaining Enterprises: Taxi service and handicraft products  
 Reach: 16,200  
 Handicraft workers make scarves, traditional clothing and other goods for sale to sustain the center. This enterprise has been so successful that the Tubileima community has used surplus funds to donate to local charities.



READ opened Bhutan's first rural library and second public-lending library in 2010. In this once isolated country, READ is helping to develop rural communities through access to knowledge and resources. During the next five years, READ will build 7-10 additional centers in Bhutan.

## URA COMMUNITY LIBRARY AND RESOURCE CENTER

Established: 2010  
 Sustaining Enterprise: Tractor rental business  
 Reach: 1,000  
 With a much needed tractor rental service, Ura villagers can now tend to their fields without the large investment cost of buying a tractor or renting at a higher rate from the nearest town of Chamkhar, which is 1.5 hours away via public transportation.



In addition to expanding our reach in Nepal with more READ Centers, we are focused on creating deeper impacts in the communities we already serve through enhanced programming.

## JHUWANI COMMUNITY LIBRARY AND RESOURCE CENTER

Established: 2002  
 Sustaining Enterprises: Ambulance service and savings cooperative  
 Reach: 35,000  
 Recently, Jhuwani's leadership started a women's cooperative with the dual purpose of sustaining the center and encouraging women to utilize the center's resources.



## JUNBESI COMMUNITY LIBRARY AND RESOURCE CENTER

Established: 1991  
 Sustaining Enterprises: Sales of trekking goods and cable television service  
 Reach: 1,921  
 The Junbesi Center was the first READ Center. Today, the center is still thriving and is run by Chungba Jee who used the center's library as a child 20 years ago.



MAPS ARE NOT TO SCALE



# Creating a Culture of Literacy in Rural Asia

Hira Gharti Chhetri received no formal education as a young girl and wasn't literate. When the Agyauli Community Library and Resource Center in Nepal opened, Hira seized the opportunity to finally learn to read. She took literacy classes that changed her life forever. Hira is now able to write her name, read books and participate in community meetings. Through her reading, Hira learned of the health risks of chewing betelnut (a common habit in Nepal), and immediately stopped this dangerous practice. Hira's newly acquired literacy skills have created an empowered woman who is determined to send her own daughter to school.



# Nurturing the Next Generation



ON AVERAGE, A READ CENTER RECEIVES **3,300** VISITS BY CHILDREN EACH YEAR.

In many rural communities in Asia, a majority of adults are illiterate. Illiteracy prevents people from accessing even the most basic health information and other critical knowledge that can improve lives. Illiterate adults have fewer job opportunities and often struggle to provide for their families. READ is changing this by helping

create a culture of literacy. In READ Centers, people who have never received any formal education are taking adult literacy classes and practicing their reading skills. With the ability to read, adults and children are enriching their lives with knowledge.

Children and students are the most avid users of READ Centers—they love to learn! In rural areas where children have limited opportunities to engage in after-school activities, a READ Center with children's books, educational toys and animated movies is a magical place. School libraries in rural areas are often run down and lack proper resources, so for many children, visiting their READ Center has become a daily routine

when they are not in class. Now, children who are unable to attend school have a place where they can continue learning at their own pace. What is the impact of all these visits by children? We have heard from many teachers that students are doing much better in school after their READ Center opened. With a place to gather, getting homework done and reading books has become a regular habit for many.



# Empowering Women and Girls



## Women and girls are marginalized in many parts

of the developing world, especially in rural areas. Many receive no formal education, leaving them vulnerable to child marriage, early pregnancy and poverty. When development dollars are invested in programs for women and girls, the returns are exponential. An educated woman has the opportunity to earn an income and will pass on knowledge to the next generation. Educated women can stop the vicious cycle of poverty that persists in rural communities.

Knowing that women and girls are powerful agents of change, READ and its partner communities place special emphasis on programs for them. Many women have limited mobility because social norms require them to stay at home unless there is an acceptable reason to venture out. READ Centers are a legitimate place for women to visit and serve as a safe space for them to gather with others to share challenges, find solutions and build better futures.

For many women in rural communities, the concept of saving money is foreign. READ Centers have brought together thousands of women who are now members of savings cooperatives. In the Jhuwani Community Library and Resource Center in Nepal, more than 500 women belong to a cooperative started by the center's women's group. Many of them are saving money for the first time in their lives. Collectively they have saved more than USD \$100,000 and extended more than \$90,000 in loans to hundreds of women who have used the funds to start their own businesses and send their children to school.





# An Empowered Woman Helps Her Community

READ GLOBAL HAS MADE A CLINTON GLOBAL INITIATIVE COMMITMENT TO EMPOWER **16,000** WOMEN AND ADOLESCENT GIRLS BY 2014.

Like most girls in her village of Ura, Tshering stopped going to school after junior high because of a lack of financial resources in her family. She was married at the age of 19 and is now a single mother at 21. She lives with her older brother's family and until recently could only contribute to the household by helping out with chores. When READ Bhutan opened its first READ Center in Ura in 2010, Tshering, ambitious and smart, was selected from many candidates for the position of assistant librarian.

She has conducted a number of reading programs, which have led to an increase in the number of daily library users at the center. Today, Tshering feels empowered. She says, "I not only earn some money, I am respected for having a job and serving the community. I help my brother provide for the family in my little ways and save for my daughter's future. I want to be able to give my daughter the chance to dream big and complete her education."



# Connecting with Computer Skills

In many of our partner communities, villagers are experiencing computers and the Internet for the first time at their READ Center. Access to the Internet opens up a world of valuable information to rural communities and also produces very practical outcomes—like getting a new job after seeing the job posting online. Hundreds of children and adults have gone through basic computer training at READ Centers and are regular visitors to the computer rooms.

READ IS UTILIZING INFORMATION COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY (ICT) TO ENHANCE OUR CORE PROGRAMS, SUCH AS LITERACY, HEALTH AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT.



# Creating Sustainability

READ works with communities to launch for-profit enterprises that generate income to maintain each center in the long run. These businesses create jobs and provide useful services in their communities. Ensuring each READ Center is sustainable is key to our success.



## The Laxmi Memorial Community Library and

Resource Center in the Syangja District of Nepal chose an innovative approach to sustainability - it launched a community radio station. Today, the station is not only generating income to sustain the center, it is also providing valuable educational programming to rural villagers. For illiterate individuals, the radio station may offer their only access to important resources and information. Syangja Community FM currently offers 20 hours of programming every day, employs 33 individuals and reaches more than 500,000 rural villagers. In addition, women are becoming some of the most popular radio jockeys.

## The Ura Community Library and Resource Center

in Bhutan has started a community-run farm tractor rental business to generate income for the center. The local farmers hire the tractor from the center for a fee to till their land. Ura village is a potato growing community and has over 50 acres of land under cultivation. With a much needed service, the villagers can now tend to their fields without the large investment cost of buying a tractor or renting at a higher rate from the nearest town which is 1.5 hours away via public transportation. The tractor rental business has been so successful, the community is already looking into a second sustaining enterprise.

## In Jhuwani, Nepal, an ambulance service is sustaining

the READ Center. This service provides transport for rural villagers in need of urgent medical care to the nearest hospital, which would otherwise take hours to reach on foot. Since the service began operating in 2002, it has transported nearly 6,000 people to the hospital so they could have immediate access to life-saving medical services. The Jhuwani community selected the ambulance service not only for economic returns that could benefit their center, but also for the welfare of the larger community.

## The Geejgarh Gyan Kendra Center in Rajasthan,

India is READ's first eco-friendly center, complete with solar panels and sustainable architecture. This innovative center has a flourishing for-profit enterprise that has created jobs for 43 local women. Its sewing and apparel business is capitalizing on the recent banning of plastic shopping bags in some parts of India by creating professional-quality cloth shopping bags, in addition to women's and men's clothing. Many of the incredible women seamstresses are earning an income for the first time in their lives.



# Rural Prosperity

Built in 1994, Thak Community Library and Resource Center was READ Nepal's fourth center. The small remote village of Tukche, where the Thak Center was established, is located in the Nepali Himalayas and is home to less than 1,000 people.

When the Thak READ Center opened many of the villagers were illiterate and few children attended school. Today, things have changed in Tukche. Adults and children can read. The town has a thriving furniture factory, seeded by READ, that is community owned and run. The factory uses wood from a local forest to create hand-made furnishings. Profits from the factory not only help sustain the center, but also provide for community enhancements. Additional income was used to build a bridge over the Kali Gandaki River, start a pre-school, and set up a hostel for children who travel a long way to attend the only local school. Today, more children are receiving an education and even more villagers have access to the READ Center. The Thak Center and its sustaining enterprise have forever transformed the Tukche community.





READ (Rural Education and Development) Global is an international non-profit organization focused on making rural communities in Bhutan, India and Nepal viable places for people to learn, build and prosper. Combining education, enterprise and community development, READ Global partners with rural villages and non-governmental organizations to create sustainable livelihoods. Since 1991, READ Global has built more than 55 Community Library and Resource Centers and provided access to vital resources for more than 1.8 million individuals. For more information or to donate, visit [www.readglobal.org](http://www.readglobal.org).